NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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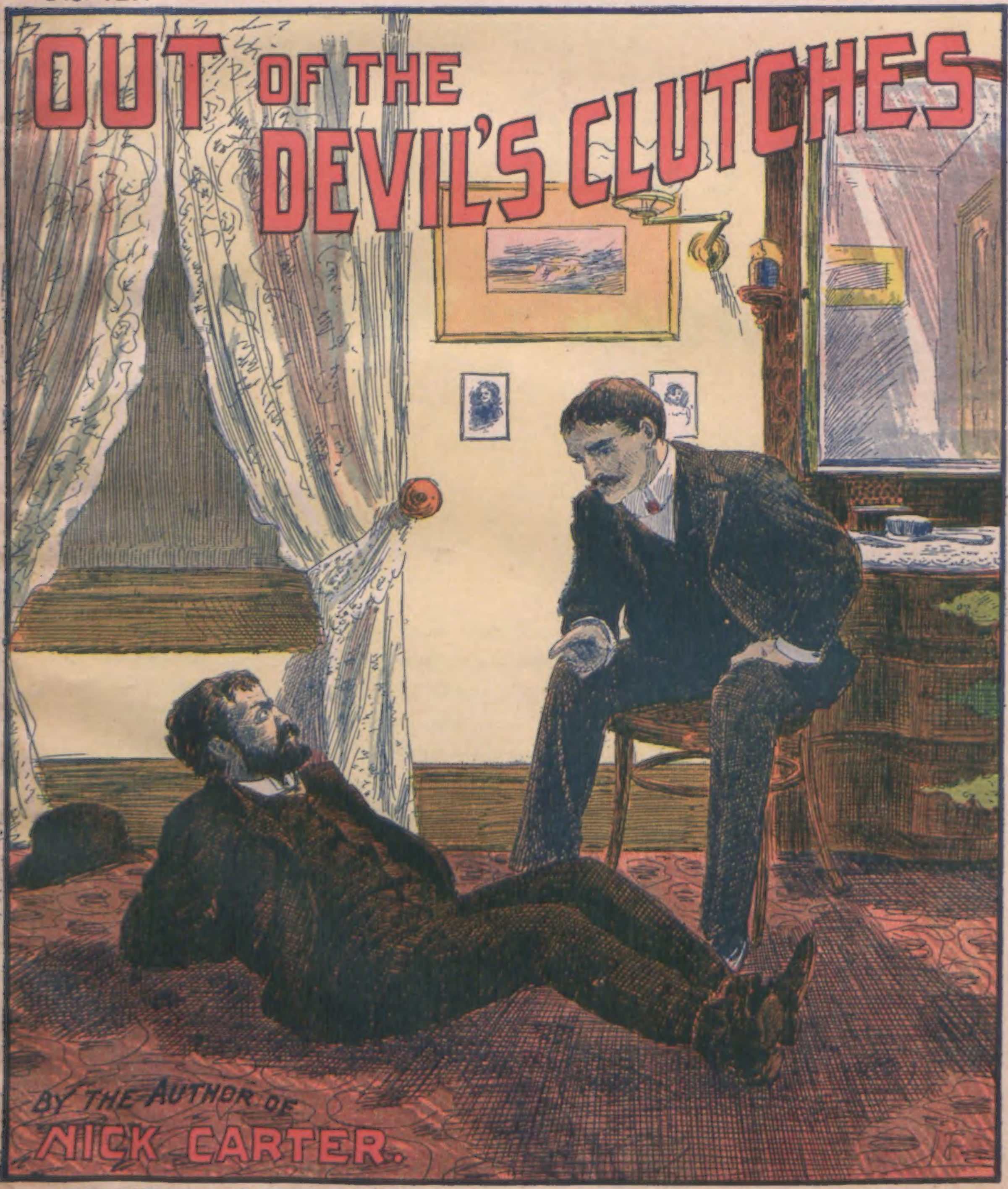
OUT OF THE DEVIL'S CLUTCHES



NICK, PANTING AFTER HIS STRUGGLE, SAT DOWN ON A CHAIR AND CALMLY LOOKED AT HIS PRISONER.

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Out of the Devil's Clutches

OR,

Nick Carter's New Friend

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

AN UNLUCKY HOUSE.

"This must be his residence. It is the number the superintendent gave me, I am sure, although I can't see to verify it in this darkness. Well, I'll soon see."

The speaker mounted the steps and rang the bell.

He had not long to wait. The door opened and before he had time to make the inquiry which was on his lips he was invited by the servant to enter.

Without hesitation he accepted the invitation.

Once inside he drew a memoranda from an inside pocket which he quietly consulted. Then turning to the servant he said:

"I am not mistaken? Mr. Nick Carter lives here?"

"He does."

"Can I see him? Is he at home?"

"I'll find out, sir. Will you give your name?"

"Say to him that I come from Superintendent Byrnes."

"Step this way."

The servant ushered him into a small reception-room or study, where a cheerful open grate fire almost made him forget the fury of the storm raging outside.

"Be seated, and I'll see if Mr. Carter is in."

The stranger gave a sweeping glance around him at the marks of good taste and comfort which he saw.

"The home of a successful man who knows his business, if half of what one hears about his shrewdness is true," thought the visitor.

In a short time he became aware of a presence.

He looked up to find a man standing at his side.

It was an elderly-looking man, with

long gray hair and beard, dressed in a coat of generous tails and ill-fitting trousers of some checkered stuff. The man's whole appearance suggested the well-to-do farmer from the interior. The visitor arose and acknowledged the other man's presence with a bow, thus disclosing the fact that he was well bred.

"You wish to see me?"

"I called to see Nicholas Carter. You are his——"

"I am Nicholas Carter, at your service."

"Not the celebrated detective?"

"If you will have it so, yes."

"I beg you will accept my apology, but—really—ah—I expected to see a younger man?"

Nick bowed and smiled, but made no reply save to ask with his eyes.

"Your business, sir."

From beneath his coat the stranger drew a sealed envelope, and while he was in the act the detective's eyes noted every movement of hand, arm and body.

"This will introduce my business with you," handing the envelope to Nick.

The latter tore the envelope open and read the brief contents of the note enclosed, which was as follows:

"Dear Carter: The bearer needs your services. This is a most interesting case. I think it best that no publicity of the affair be made until the crime is unraveled. There is no one so fitted to unravel the mystery as you, and I have sent him to your house. Keep me informed as you make progress. The queer circumstances of the case deeply interest me.

"Byrnes."

"Be seated," was Nick's invitation, after reading the note.

The stranger was about to comply, when Nick added:

"First you had better lay off your heavy coat. It is wet and uncomfortable."

The visitor expressed his thanks, and complied.

Nick's quick glance took in the well-dressed form of a man above the average height and build, with smooth, handsome face, iron gray hair, and all the bearing of a person of wealth and society.

After both were comfortably seated, Nick picked up a box of cigars from the table and offered his visitor one, taking one himself.

When both cigars were "going," Nick broached the business at hand.

"You seek my professional services? What is the motive of the case?"

"Robbery."

"Money?"

"No; diamonds."

"Value?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars."

As he named this sum the visitor kept his eyes on Nick's face.

Evidently he expected to see the detective start with astonishment.

Nick, however, never moved a muscle of his face or body except to take several lazy pulls at his cigar.

"Where were they when stolen?"

"In my residence!"

"And where is that?"

"On Madison avenue."

"When did they disappear?"

"Last night."

"Have you any clew to the thief?"

"No."

"Suspect anyone?"

The visitor moved uneasily in his chair, knocked the ashes from his cigar and hesitated just the slightest before he again aspirated:

"No."

"You are——"

"Pardon me. I should have introduced myself. Here is my card."

Nick read:

"Robert Mandeville,
No. —— Madison avenue,
New York City."

"Lately returned from Europe," drawled Nick.

"Yes," replied Mr. Mandeville, with a look of surprise. "You know me?"

"Know of you," smiled the detective.

Mr. Mandeville showed some uneasiness.

"Unlucky house that—the one you live in," half yawned Nick.

"It has certainly been unlucky to me," groaned Mandeville.

"And to a former occupant."

"I had not heard about it."

"Indeed."

"No. Robbed also?"

"Worse."

"Murdered? Heavens, not murdered?"

"No. Suicide."

"Who was he?"

"It was not he. A Mrs.—what was her name—Montgomery—no—Mont—Mont—ah! Montremy—a widow."

"When did this happen?"

"Some two years ago."

"No doubt about it being a case of suicide, you say?"

"She was found dead with one of her handkerchiefs saturated with chloroform over her face, and the empty vial on the bed."

"It might have been placed there by another—the handkerchief," suggested Mr. Mandeville.

"No! She was found dead, locked in a room from which no bolts were drawn or window left unlocked."

"Great Scott! The same condition of affairs exist in the robbery of my diamonds."

"What condition of affairs?"

"They were taken from a room which was found under lock and bolt in the morning."

"Where in the house is the room situated?"

"In the rear on the second floor."

"Humph!"

"Was it in the same room the suicide occurred?"

"No."

"What room then?"

"The third floor front."

"My daughter occupies that room. If she discovers what happened within its walls she will be badly frightened."

"Let us hope she will not hear of the suicide," said Nick. "We will now proceed with the history of this diamond robbery. Suppose you give me all the particulars. I am going to ask you some questions. If you want me to recover your diamonds you will not hesitate to answer them all freely and without reserve."

CHAPTER II.

THE THEFT OF THE DIAMONDS.

Nick settled himself still more lazily in his easy-chair, and began his catechism:

"How long have you lived in that house?"

"Since the 28th of February."

"About one month?"

"Just four weeks."

"Do you own it?"

"No."

"Leased?"

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"I do not recollect the name. My daughter negotiated the lease."

Nick's eyes settled into an expression more sleepy than ever.

"Why did your daughter transact the business?"

"My wife and I were in Europe. She had it all ready for our occupancy when we returned."

"At your request?"

"With my approval."

"The proposition came from her?"

"What proposition?"

"To lease a furnished residence and have it ready for your occupancy when you returned."

"No, there was no proposition. It was

a surprise. When we landed she met us at the wharf and drove us to our new home, which was all ready to receive us."

"Humph!"

"You certainly do not suspect my daughter?"

"My dear sir, I suspect no one—yet. I am merely collecting my facts."

"Because, even if she were capable of such a crime, there would be no reason for her to commit it."

"Why?"

"The diamonds were her property."

"Ah!"

"Yes."

"How did she get them?"

"By her mother's will."

"You just now spoke of your own and wife's arrival from Europe."

"My second wife."

There was a perceptible flush on Mandeville's face, and another uneasy movement in his chair, as he made this explanation.

Nick mentally noted both signs of uneasiness, and followed them up with a question on a new tack.

"Been married long—this second time?"

"About five months."

"Some one you knew a long time before she became your wife?"

"No, I can't say that. Indeed, I never saw her until last summer."

"Where did you meet her?"

"At Long Branch."

"You—you can trust her?"

"I always thought I could."

Nick saw that Mandeville was growing very uneasy, and he once more shifted his line of inquiry.

"You are a wealthy man, Mr. Mandeville?"

"Only moderately so. I have an income of about fifteen thousand dollars a year."

"Your first wife, then, must have been wealthy."

"No. She had nothing except those diamonds."

Nick's steady, unflinching look into Mandeville's face continued—mutely demanding an explanation, and an explanation was given.

"She had a mania for diamonds. When she married me she had two hundred thousand dollars in her own right. This she gradually transposed into a magnificent collection of diamonds, declaring that she expected full support for herself and our daughter from me."

"And at her death she willed the diamonds to her daughter?"

"Yes."

"And nothing more?"

"There was nothing more which she possessed."

"An only child?"

"Yes."

"You own no house in New York?"

"No. My property is all in Chicago."

"Where you have lived most of your life?"

"Yes. Except the last eighteen months."

"Which is since your first wife's death, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Where have you spent those eighteen months?"

"Last winter and spring in this city. The summer at Long Branch. In Europe since my marriage till one month ago."

"When you were here last winter you did not keep house?"

"No, we boarded."

"We?"

"My daughter and I."

"Your daughter did not accompany you on your wedding trip?"

"No."

"Where was she?"

"Visiting a school friend."

"Where?"

"In Cincinnati."

"Why did she take a house without consulting you?"

"She has always had her way, and she knew my wife and I had agreed to live in New York after our return from Europe."

"Why?"

"Because Mrs. Mandeville has a prejudice against Chicago and a preference for New York."

"What is the basis of her prejudice against Chicago?"

"I don't know."

"You've asked her?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"She merely gave an evasive reply."

"Humph! She has lived there?"

"No. I think not."

"Where then?"

"In New Orleans much of her life."

"How old is she?"

"About thirty years."

"Ah!"

Mr. Mandeville once more colored under the detective's exclamation.

Nick's next question, however, relieved his embarrassment.

"The house was leased by your daughter for a certain length of time?"

"For only one year."

"Why not for more?"

"She knew I wanted to buy a home here and took it for the least time the agent would let it. Meanwhile I will have plenty of time to look around and make a satisfactory purchase."

"Who signed the lease?"

"My daughter."

"Who paid the advance?"

"She did."

"A quarter?"

"No; only a month."

"She had money?"

"Not much."

"Enough to pay this month's rent. How much was it?"

"Two hundred and fifty dollars. She borrowed it from the father of her friend in Cincinnati. I gave it back to her soon after my arrival."

"Now for the robbery. You say they were taken from the room in the rear of the second floor?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"I mean between what hours?"

"Between midnight and morning."

"Was there any one in the room at the time?"

"Yes. It is my bedchamber."

"And you were asleep in that room when they were taken?"

"Yes."

"Anybody else?"

"My wife."

"You heard nothing after retiring—no noise?"

"No, I slept without waking till morning."

"And your wife?"

"Heard no noise, either. She was sleeping soundly, when I arose, and only woke when I discovered the absence of the diamonds and aroused her."

"She was not simulating sleep?"

"No. Of that I am sure. I was careful to observe her condition before I spoke to her or touched her, and I just as carefully noted her actions when she came out of her sleep."

"You suspected her, then?"

"Not of—stealing—of the robbery. But when I missed the diamonds my first impression was that she had concealed them during my sleep for the purpose of playing a practical joke on me."

"Go on."

"When I went to the bed where she lay I believed I should find her shamming sleep."

"You did not then suspect robbery?"

"No."

"But you did when you saw that her sleep was real?"

"No, even then I thought she had fallen asleep after her plans were laid. I knew she was a good sleeper."

"How soon after she awoke did you get the first impression that it was a robbery and not a joke?"

"As soon as Mrs. Mandeville was fully awake and begun to understand what I meant."

"What did she do or say?"

"She accused me of exactly what I suspected her."

"Of hiding them as a joke on her?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"We both made a careful search of the room."

"You said every door and window was found secure and safe?"

"Yes. The door leading into the hall was not only locked but bolted on the inside."

"And the windows? Had you no ventilation?"

"Oh, yes! One window was down from the top, but there are iron gratings on the outside of the two windows in these rooms, and these gratings were secure and fast."

"There are no other doors or windows in the room?"

"Only the doors leading to a bathroom and a closet."

"You think, therefore, that no one could have entered, taken the jewels, and carried them off, leaving the room as it was found by you?"

"Utterly impossible."

"Without the aid of some one who remained inside?"

Mandeville turned pale and started to rise from his chair.

"Now keep calm," said Nick, waving him back into his seat. "We must look at every possible phase of the case if we expect success in the end."

"But who could have rendered this assistance? Who——"

"Your wife, for instance?"

"No! no! I am sure she knows nothing about it."

"She may be a somnambulist."

"What do you mean?"

"May have risen in her sleep, carried them out of the room, hidden them, and then returned without waking."

"I thought of that, but she never walked in her sleep in her life to any one's knowledge."

"Might you have done so?"

"No. I am no somnambulist."

"How does it come you had the diamonds in the house?"

"They had just arrived from Chicago in the afternoon, too late to be sent to the safe deposit company."

"They had been on deposit in Chicago?"

"Yes."

"At whose suggestion were they brought to New York?"

"Well, my daughter talked so much about them that Mrs. Mandeville expressed a great desire to see them."

"And she proposed that you send for them?"

"No. My daughter made the request. Besides, as New York was to be our future home, I concluded it would be better to have them here."

"How old is your daughter?"

"She was eighteen the day we arrived from Europe."

"Not yet of age? Who is her guardian?"

"I am."

"Then you really had the diamonds in your charge?"

"Yes. That is what gave me additional worry over the theft."

"When your daughter became of age the jewels were to be her own outright?"

"Well, no. There were conditions to the bequest."

"Indeed! And those conditions were what?"

"That she should become the wife of a man worth in his own right as much as the diamonds cost."

"Two hundred thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"A queer bequest."

"No. I think not. Her mother was providing against a necessity for her daughter to ever sell the diamonds or any part of them."

"What if the devisee should marry a man worth less than two hundred thousand dollars?"

"Then the diamonds were to be held by a trustee for the eldest daughter—the issue of such marriage—who should take them under similar conditions."

"And meantime?"

"They were to remain in charge of the trustee."

"Who was?"

"Myself."

"Did your wife—the present Mrs. Mandeville—know of these facts?"

"Yes."

"What members of the household are there besides yourself, your wife and your daughter?"

"My servants."

"How many and who are they?"

"John Jenkins, my valet and butler, Jennie Boyd, maid to my wife and my daughter, the cook and the chambermaid."

"All new servants?"

"No, sir. Jenkins and the maid were in my family before my first wife died."

"You can trust them?"

"I think I can."

"That is about all I have to ask by way of information. For the rest I must take up the case personally."

"It is what I should like," exclaimed Mandeville, with a sigh of relief from his cross-examination.

"I must become a member of your household," was Nick's next announcement.

"What?"

"A member of your family, I said—one who would naturally be on near, confidential terms with you and your wife and daughter, and have some liberties in the house."

"A—some one in disguise?"

"Exactly. A relative if it can be arranged."

"But how? I don't understand."

"Have you no relative whom I could personate?"

"Why—no! None who resembles you in the least."

Nick smiled.

"A resemblance, except in size, does not matter. But it should be some one who lives at a distance, and who would not be likely to turn up in person or by letter."

"I have very few relatives. There is one whom I have not seen in years and with whom I've not been on good terms. But you couldn't well take that identity."

"Why?"

"It is a woman. My sister."

"Where does she live?"

"In California."

"Her husband?"

"She has none. She is a widow with one son."

"A son? How old is the son?"

"About twenty-one or two, I believe."

"He will do."

"But you're too old."

"I'll arrange all that," smiled Nick, "once I know how he looks. Do you?"

"Only from a photograph taken two years ago."

"Sent to you?"

"Sent to my daughter."

"By himself?"

"No; by his mother. It was an attempt to reconcile me, and get my influence to aid her son in business."

"You did so?"

"I refused. I found it utterly impossible to forget my sister's offense when she

threw herself away on a man who was a gambler."

"Can you get that photograph for me?"

"Luckily, I have it in my pocket now."

Mandeville produced it and handed it to Nick.

"He will do," was Nick's verdict, after carefully examining the picture.

"What! Surely you cannot make yourself look like that?"

"Yes, only as this was taken two years ago, we will have to make some allowances. That is not hard to do, however."

"Astonishing! I will only believe it when I see it."

"Then if you will wait here half an hour you shall see. I'll introduce you to your nephew from California, who will become your guest in your Madison avenue house to-morrow. Interest yourself in these etchings while I change my identity to—by the way, the young man's name is——"

"Larry Blake."

Nick bowed and left the room.

Twenty minutes later he appeared once more before Mr. Mandeville as a young man twenty-two years old, bearing a striking resemblance to the face in the photograph.

"Marvelous!" was Mandeville's verdict.

"Behold your nephew Larry Blake, from California," said Nick. "Will I do?"

"Excellently well."

"About his size, physically?"

"I know nothing about it—whether he is large or small."

"Does your daughter?"

"She knows no more about it than I."

"That's good. Size, therefore, does not enter into the case."

"You're not corresponding with Mrs. Blake or her son?"

"No."

"Nor your daughter, either?"

"No."

"That is well. Tell me all you or your daughter know about Larry Blake and his mother, so I may make no mistake."

Mr. Mandeville complied with this request, and in five minutes had posted the detective on all that was known by the Mandevilles of the Blakes, as Mr. Mandeville supposed.

There was some further conversation between the two, in which Nick rehearsed Mr. Mandeville in the part he was to play, and then the latter arose to take his leave.

"One moment," said Nick, as Mandeville had reached the door. "If you can induce your daughter in some way to give up that front room to me I should like to occupy it while I remain your guest."

Mandeville looked as if he would like to ask the detective's reasons for the request, but he only replied:

"I will try to arrange it. But Julia is quite headstrong, and she may refuse."

"I hope she will not. Expect Larry Blake about four o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

———

CHAPTER III.

WHERE CHICK AND IDA COME IN.

As the street door closed upon Mr. Mandeville, Chick and Ida stepped out into the study from behind a heavy pair of portieres.

They were standing before the grate when Nick came in from seeing his client out.

"Well?" said Nick, looking at his two assistants.

"Queer case," was Chick's answer.

"You remember the suicide?"

"Mrs. Montremy, the mysterious widow, about whom so little was known!"

"Yes."

"I remember it. You had your suspi-

cions at the time that she did not die at her own hands."

"Yet I've never been able as yet to prove that some one helped her out of the world."

"As yet?"

"That's what I said. Ever since she died I've been waiting for this chance."

"What chance?"

"To get into that house and that room for a quiet, undisturbed, unsuspected investigation."

"And now?"

"And now I think I will kill two birds with one stone."

"But——"

"But I want you to go to New Orleans and find out all you can about Mrs. Mandeville's life before she met her present husband. On your way down to the Crescent City, stop at Cincinnati."

"What for?"

"To find out what you can about Miss Julia's school friend, whom she is said to have visited last winter, and all the other circumstances of the visit there which may be of interest to know."

"When will I start?"

"In a day or so. As soon as I get some data for you to work upon. The name of Miss Julia's friend, for instance, and Mrs. Mandeville's name before her recent marriage."

"I'll hold myself in readiness."

"Have you anything for me to do," modestly inquired Ida.

Nick looked at her a few moments, and then said:

"After all, Chick, I think I'll send Ida to Cincinnati and New Orleans instead of you."

"Why?"

"She ought to be able to work on the case there more easily than a man, for whoever goes will have to deal principally with women."

"That's true."

"Besides, I may have work for you here which she couldn't do."

"All right."

"Then, Ida, hold yourself in readiness, and start as soon as you receive from me your memoranda."

"I will be ready."

———

CHAPTER IV.

"WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?"

The morning after Nick Carter heard the story of the diamond robbery, the Mandeville family came down to breakfast somewhat late.

Mr. Mandeville found a telegram lying unopened upon his plate.

As he opened it and read its contents he was aware that both of the other occupants of the table were watching him.

It was, therefore, natural that he exhibited some nervousness. Clearing his throat, he said, in a tone intended to be indifferent:

"My dears, we are to have a visitor."

"A visitor!" exclaimed Miss Mandeville. "Oh, dear; and at this time above all others. Who is it?"

"He is my nephew—Larry Blake"

There was a crash. Miss Julia's coffee cup, which she had just raised to her lips, fell, and was shattered into bits upon her plate.

A deep flush suffused her face. The accident appeared to annoy her. She arose from her seat murmuring something about her awkwardness, and busied herself wiping drops of the coffee from her gown.

"But, my dear, you have only one nephew, have you not?" inquired Mrs. Mandeville, when the digression of the broken cup had passed.

"Yes, only this one."

"He is the son of your only sister?"

"Yes."

"I thought I understood you refused to receive his mother's advances?"

"So I did until recently. I have, however, relented, and will give him some assistance, if, after an acquaintance, I find him worthy."

"When will he be here?"

"Some time to-day. This dispatch is dated Cleveland, where it was filed last evening."

"Will he stay long?"

"I really don't know. Everything depends on circumstances. I shall try to get him a situation of some kind."

"But you are not well known in New York. You could do better for him in Chicago."

Mr. Mandeville coughed.

"That is true, and I may have to send him there. However, I want to get well acquainted with him first."

Julia arose and asked to be excused.

"Before you go, Julia, tell me: Would you object to changing rooms while your cousin is here?"

Julia looked at her father sharply before she replied:

"Change rooms! I—give—up my room to this—cousin? Is that what you mean?"

"Why, yes. He will be a guest, you know, and the scenes from the street will interest him. I should like to have him in a front room."

"If you wish it. Why, certainly."

"That's a good girl. The rear room above our own is very pleasant. Will you get the chambermaid and Jennie to make the change this forenoon?"

"Certainly."

She passed out of the dining-room and went straight to her own room. Locking the door, she threw herself into an easy chair, clasped her hands over her heart, and exclaimed, in an undertone:

"My God! What does this mean?"

Then she sat mutely gazing out of the window into space until the chambermaid knocked at the door, and said she was ready to "change the rooms."

After Julia left the breakfast table Mr. Mandeville went from the dining-room to the library.

Jenkins, his valet, soon joined him there, and closed the door when he entered.

"Well, Jenkins," said Mandeville, in a low voice, "what have you to report?"

"The missus went out last evening after you left the house."

"In all that storm?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who went with her?"

"She went alone."

"Did she say where she was going?"

"No, sir. She thinks no one saw her go or come."

"How long was she gone?"

"About two hours."

"It might have been Julia. Was she muffled?"

"Yes, sir; but it was not Miss Julia."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir; 'cause Miss Julia went out ten minutes after the missus."

"What?"

"I knowed it would s'prise you, but it is the truth. I was on watch as you charged me, and saw both of 'em leave."

"You didn't see their faces?"

"No, sir."

"Might one of them not have been Jennie the cook, or the chambermaid?"

"No, sir. Them three was in the kitchen, an' I was with them while both the ladies was out."

"How long was Julia gone?"

"She came in half an hour before the missus."

"Thank you, Jenkins. Here's a five dollar bill to help you keep your eyes open and your lips shut—to others."

"Much obliged. I'm sure I'm all eyes and mum at the same time."

"That will do. Let me know if you discover anything else."

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE LEASE.

About four o'clock in the afternoon a cab drove up to the Mandeville residence bearing the counterfeit Larry Blake.

Mr. Mandeville received him, and after a formal greeting, sent him in Jenkins' charge, to his room, where his trunks were also deposited.

Much to Nick's satisfaction, he was conducted to the third story front room.

"In luck from the start!" was his mental comment.

As soon as Jenkins went out he locked the door and began an inspection of the room.

There were two front windows.

A hall room adjoined this chamber on the east, but there was no connecting door between, as is found in most houses of that build. Instead of the usual closet and wash-room in the rear, a solid wall divided it from the middle room.

Opposite the door against the division wall, stood the grate flues and mantel. Between the mantel and the rear of the room was a deep, long chest, built for a wardrobe.

Nick's wandering eyes soon fixed themselves upon this closet.

In a minute he had the door open.

Lighting a match, he made a hasty examination.

"I'll give it a more careful search some other time," he muttered.

"Now, I'll make my toilet and go down to get acquainted with the ladies."

Ten minutes later he walked into the large reception room on the first floor.

A young lady rose at his entrance—a lovely girl, with a rather haughty mien and commanding presence.

He realized at once that he stood before Julia Mandeville.

Advancing with a smile, Nick bowed and said:

"Am I right when I suppose I see my charming cousin?"

A scornful smile curled the girl's lips as she replied:

"I think you are mistaken."

"You are Miss Mandeville, are you not?"

She inclined her head in haughty but silent assent.

"Then I am your cousin, Larry Blake."

"Indeed."

The word was half sneered, half snapped.

"I fear I am not welcome."

"You are very observant."

"I hoped for a warmer reception."

"It is a pity you are disappointed."

"You will like me better when you shall have known me longer."

"Possibly. I could not well like you less."

She swept past him and left the room.

Nick stood for some moments staring at the open door through which she had disappeared. Then he shook his head and said to himself:

"I don't much like the way she has received me."

He started to leave the room, but Mandeville met him on the threshold and motioned him back.

Mr. Mandeville then closed the door and led the way to the opposite side of the room where he asked Nick to take a seat.

Then he spoke in a low tone of voice.

"I have some information which, much as I dislike to disclose it to you, I feel it my duty to do so."

"Thank you. I think you are acting wisely."

"I feel I can trust you implicitly."

"Thank you again. You have not mistaken your man."

"Before I proceed further in this affair

I want you to make me one promise. Nay, I demand it?"

"State the nature of the promise."

"If it transpires that my wife or my daughter is in the slightest manner involved or implicated in the disappearance of the diamonds, I must have your word that no publicity whatever shall be made of whatever discoveries you may make."

"That is an extraordinary request to make."

"Yet a natural one to come from a man who loves his wife and daughter more than all the diamonds in the world."

"I fear I cannot give you the promise."

"Then I will refuse to prosecute further inquiry into the mystery."

"But you cannot stop my investigation."

"Probably not; but without my cooperation you cannot possibly succeed."

"I am not sure of that."

"Unless you promise what I ask you must leave this house at once."

Nick remained in deep meditation for a few seconds, and then replied:

"Will it be sufficient if I promise to use any discoveries I may make in this investigation in such a manner as to completely shield your wife and daughter from publicity as to any connection they may have had with the disappearance of the diamonds?"

"Yes. If you will swear to do that, and will further swear that you can do it—that there will be no danger of the case getting beyond your control—I will consent to go ahead in the investigation with you."

"Very well. I will promise—will even swear to what you ask."

"I am satisfied and trust you fully."

"Now for your information. You suspect that your wife or your daughter had a hand in the mystery?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

"I don't know. Listen and I'll explain. Before I left the house last night to visit Superintendent Byrnes, and afterward you, I supposed my wife and daughter were both in bed."

"Well?"

"Not long after I left the house Mrs. Mandeville also went out—unobserved, as she thought."

"Stay long?"

"Two hours."

"Well?"

"Ten minutes after Mrs. Mandeville left, Julia also slipped out."

"Humph! Stay long?"

"She returned half an hour before my wife."

"Might have been shadowing Mrs. Mandeville."

"I thought of that."

"Who gave you this information?"

"Jenkins, my valet."

"Watching?"

"Before I went out I told him to keep his eyes open around the house without being seen himself."

"Now that I have agreed to what you requested, you must give me a few further facts."

"What are they?"

"I want the name and address of the school friend your daughter visited in Cincinnati during your absence in Europe."

"Miss Inez de Garvelli."

"The address?"

"Cincinnati."

"I mean the street and number?"

"I never asked."

"Then I want your wife's name before you married her."

"Her name was Potter—Augusta Potter."

"Her maiden name?"

"No; she was a widow."

"Oh! Her home was in New Orleans, you said?"

"Yes."

"Did your daughter ever express to

you a dislike for her cousin, Larry Blake?"

"On the contrary, she always seemed interested in him, though they never met."

"Did they ever correspond?"

"No. The only communication she ever held with her California relatives was a few letters which passed between herself and her aunt two years ago, when she received the photograph of Blake which you have."

"Why was the correspondence discontinued?"

"I forbade it. I would not even permit her to keep the photograph. She was a mere child."

"She has since then partaken somewhat of your dislike, evidently."

"Why?"

"She snubbed me most delightfully just before you came into the room."

"How does that suit you?"

"It does not suit me I hoped to get on intimate terms with—ahem!—my fair cousin."

"I am sorry she treats you so. It is not her way of acting. Shall I intercede for you?"

"No! no! Not for the world. She might suspect."

"Very well."

"I want to see the lease for this house—your duplicate."

"I have none."

"Who has it?"

"There is none but the original."

"Where is that?"

"The agent has it."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know."

"Who does?"

"My daughter."

"Why don't you find out?"

"She refuses to tell. Says it is her secret, and laughs at my curiosity."

"But you pay your rent?"

"She paid the first month in advance, as I told you, and I paid the sum back to her."

"And then?"

"Then? We are still on the first month. Another month will begin to-morrow."

"And another month's rent will be due?"

"Yes."

"To whom will you pay it?"

"To Julia."

"And she will turn it over to—"

"The agent, whoever he is."

"I will look up the owner to-morrow."

"I have already done so."

"Who is he?"

"A Mr. Fitch."

"Where does he live?"

"He is traveling abroad somewhere."

"Has he no relatives who might give the information?"

"No; he is an old bachelor, almost alone in the world, and very eccentric, they say. He had this house and the adjoining one built or rebuilt under his own directions, some four years ago."

"Ah! then he owns the adjoining house, too?"

"Yes."

"And the same agent has the renting of it?"

"I presume so."

"That house seems to be unoccupied—closed up."

"It is in charge of a servant—an old colored man."

"How do you know?"

"I've seen him go in and out frequently."

"Is the house furnished. as this was when you leased it?"

"I presume it is."

"I must get acquainted with the old colored servant."

"What for?"

"I may—well, I might discover the agent who rented your daughter the house."

"What good would that do?"

Nick looked sleepily through the window, but mentally he was exclaiming:

"Well, the general stupidity of the ordinary man is marvelous."

To Mr. Mandeville he replied:

"I want to know the reason for her secret in the matter of the lease, that is all."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK MAKES A NEW FRIEND.

After dinner that same evening Nick left the house with the expressed purpose of seeing something of New York city by gaslight.

"Don't get lost," said Miss Julia, as he was about to leave.

The tone of voice and smile which accompanied the admonition gave Nick something to think about as he started down the street.

It was the first word she had addressed to him since she left him so unceremoniously in the parlor soon after his arrival.

Half an hour later he was in his own house, in the presence of Chick and Ida.

To the latter he gave the Cincinnati and New Orleans data, and instructed her to start on her mission by the next train, and rush it through.

Turning to Chick, he said:

"I want you to watch the Mandeville house and the vacant house next door every night after eight o'clock till daylight, and shadow any one who leaves either building."

"All right."

"Better start at once."

"I'll be off in ten minutes."

When he returned to the Mandeville residence he found Julia in the parlor alone.

Instead of repeating her chilling manners of the afternoon, she advanced, held out her hand to him with a smile, and said:

"Will you not forgive me, cousin, for the impolite way in which I greeted you to-day?"

"Willingly," he said, taking her hand and looking steadily and unflinchingly into her deep, black eyes. "But will you tell me why I was received with so much disfavor?"

"I was not myself."

"But you are yourself now."

"Yes. We all dissimulate at times; pretend to be what we are not."

Nick imagined the black eyes snapped with unusual fire as she spoke.

"Then I am to be welcome?"

"That depends on how you behave while you are here."

"I will try to do my best."

"And be my friend as well as cousin?"

Nick imagined there was an unusual depth to the plea.

"Certainly."

"I want you to be my friend. I need one very much."

"I shall be delighted."

"We are all but strangers now. We ought to be confidantes."

"With all my heart I am willing."

"You and I must become better acquainted. Our near relationship might be the bond to bring us close together."

"You have but to command me."

"We shall get on together famously then."

"I hope so."

"Till to-morrow, au revoir."

"Good-night."

She glided out of the room, giving him another puzzling, smiling glance.

"She may not know I am not Larry Blake, but she suspects," thought Nick. "Can it be, after all, that she has corresponded with the Blakes without her father's knowledge? If so, I will have to change my plans somewhat."

After meditating a full minute, he added, mentally:

"Not, however, till I find out more about that third floor front room."

Then he went upstairs to his apartment.

Locking the door, and turning up the gas, he began a careful scrutiny of the room.

First he went into the closet and removed a few pieces of miscellaneous clothing which hung there.

Then he closed the door and remained in the dark for several minutes.

"If there is a corresponding closet in the other house it is unoccupied," was his conclusion, as he re-entered his room.

Going to his trunk, Nick unlocked it and took therefrom a bull's-eye lantern, which he lighted and carried back into the closet.

Then he began a minute search.

The wainscoting was three feet higher than that which ran around the room on the outside.

He noted this fact with evident satisfaction.

But a look of disappointment finally overspread his face.

"It is there, I'd stake my life, but it must be a Jim Dandy," he muttered. "It is so well concealed that no one can locate it on this side without a sounding examination, and that might attract attention in the other house.

"I'm not ready for such work yet. So I'll just lay low till I get more information and know just exactly what I'm after when I strike."

He locked up his lantern in his trunk and went to take some rest. Before he laid himself down he did something very mysterious, which we shall hear about later.

CHAPTER VII.

NICK SETS HIS TRAP.

When Nick rose in the morning he hastened to make his toilet, for he had overslept himself.

While brushing his hair his comb fell behind the dresser.

He pulled the dresser away from the wall to recover the comb.

A piece of paper fluttered to the floor from the place where it had lodged.

He picked it up.

"Piece of a letter," he muttered. "Probably hers."

It was about one-quarter of a sheet of note paper.

One side was blank. The other was written upon.

Nick saw that the writing was in the hand of a lady.

The signature at the bottom was confirmation. It was signed "Inez."

"Her Cincinnati friend," was Nick's ready observation.

The date "March 11th" was also on the letter opposite the signature. The fragment was as follows:

"——and I hope all will turn out as planned. Your money order for two hundred and fifty dollars came yesterday. I cashed it and turned it over to him in the afternoon. I can't tell you how delighted he was. Will leave that for him to do personally some other time. Inez.

"March 11th."

Nick carefully folded the bit of paper with the blank side out, and laid it away in his pocketbook.

Late as he was, he found only Mr. Mandeville in the dining-room.

"The ladies have sent down word that we shall not wait for them," said Mr. Mandeville.

While they sat at the table, and during the absence of the servants Nick hurriedly asked:

"What was the date of your payment to Miss Julia of the first month's rent which her friend's father advanced?"

"I don't remember. But I can tell by examining my check stubs."

"About what date was it?"

"The first week in March."

"That will answer. It is near enough. Now tell me whether Miss Julia or Mrs. Mandeville received any letter on the day before yesterday?"

"I'll find out for you after breakfast."

Jenkins came in at this moment and the conversation was changed.

Half an hour after they left the table Mandeville called Nick into the parlor and said:

"Jenkins tells me the postman left two letters on the four o'clock delivery day before yesterday."

"For whom?"

"One for Mrs. Mandeville and the other for Julia."

"Who delivered the letters to their owners?"

"Jennie, the maid, who took them from Jenkins."

"When is the second month's rent due?"

"In a few days."

"Can you pay it to your daughter to-day?"

"Yes."

"Then please do so."

"All right."

"At noon."

"Not before?"

"No, at twelve o'clock."

"I shall remember."

"I am going out. Do not expect me till dinner time."

When Julia Mandeville left her father's house, that afternoon, she thought she had assured herself that no one noticed where she went.

She was not aware of the fact that the same old farmer-like looking man whom her father had visited two nights before never lost sight of her till she entered a Broadway bank.

He came up on the outside in time to see her indorse a check at a public desk and present it to the paying-teller.

He further saw her give the teller a smile and nod, which explained that she was known to him and needed no identification.

She got the money and went direct to the nearest post-office station.

Nick Carter never lost sight of her.

He saw her get not only one money order application, but a number, which she proceeded to fill out and present to the clerk.

It took some time for the latter to make out the orders.

Nick only entered the post office area when he saw Julia get the money orders and go to a table to inclose them in a letter which was ready to mail.

Having inclosed the orders she sealed the envelope and turned it face up to wax the stamps.

As she did so, Nick came up behind her.

He read the address:

"Inez de Garvelli,
"New Orleans,
"La."

He had not time to note the street and number before she snatched the letter up and turned with a fierce look upon the person who had presumed to look over her shoulder.

"Gol darn these here city post-offices! Why can't they have pens and ink handy to direct letters, as we have at Elmville!" muttered the apparently old countryman, gazing all over the table.

"Here is a pen, sir," she said, picking one up from before his eyes and handing it to him.

He brought it close up to his face before he exclaimed:

"Blowed if it ain't. Guess I'd a been a mighty sight better off if I hadn't forgot my specks when I left home."

Julia smiled at the old man's efforts to direct his letter, and mailing her own, she went away leaving him at his hard labor.

At dinner that evening Larry Blake an-

nounced that he had secured tickets from the theatre, and hoped his uncle, cousin and aunt would go with him.

To his utter disappointment Mrs. Mandeville pleaded headache and asked to be excused.

He was equally surprised when Julia accepted the invitation.

Mr. Mandeville was shrewd enough to accept also.

Jenkins let them in on their return from the theatre.

Nick noticed a quick, intelligent look exchanged by master and man, and suspected its import.

He went directly to his room.

Half an hour later Mr. Mandeville knocked softly at his door and was admitted.

"She was out again."

"Your wife?"

"Yes. Slipped out, as she thought unobserved, soon after we left."

"I'll tell you to-morrow where she went—perhaps."

"Why, how can you?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Someone else followed her?"

Nick nodded.

"Is this keeping your promise to me?"

"Oh, yes. My assistant is my second self. Have no fear."

"One word more. Did you lay the trap? Did you expect her to stay at home from the theatre to-night to go out afterwards, as she did?"

"No—not her."

"Not her?"

"The trap was for your daughter."

"Ah, Julia?"

"Yes, I expected her to do exactly what your wife did."

"And was disappointed?"

"In one sense, yes. You had better go now, sir. If you stay too long it may arouse suspicion."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

"Wish I could see Chick to-night. But I dare not leave the house—or this room. So I must wait till morning," soliloquized Nick.

"Now I'll turn in. This sleeping with one eye and both ears open is not as refreshing as sleep unincumbered with business."

Going to his trunk he took out a wig of women's hair, went to the bed, and after some manipulation stepped back to view his work.

Any one entering the room at that moment would have been certain that a woman's form was under the covers and a woman's head, half concealed by her floating loosened hair, was on the pillow.

In the next place he took a woman's outfit from his trunk and threw some of them over the arms and back of his easy-chair, and the rest up in a closet.

Then he put out the gas and threw himself, fully dressed, upon a lounge, which was partly concealed by the washstand, pulled a blanket over him and dropped into what he called a "half-cocked sleep."

This ceremony had been gone through the night before, and he intended to repeat it each night so long as he occupied the room.

"The trap may never be sprung," he told himself, "but if it is, there will be big game caught."

———

CHAPTER VIII.

CHICK'S DISCOVERIES—A LUNCHEON WITH JULIA.

Next day Nick lost no time in meeting Chick.

"Make your report," was Nick's business-like order.

"I followed her."

"Yes."

"She went down to Madison Square."

"Well?"

"Hired a carriage and drove off."

"You hired another and chased her."

"Exactly, and a long chase it was. She brought up finally at the Astor House."

"Go on."

"She went to a reception-room and sent a card to one of the guests."

"Who answered it?"

"A person. They talked earnestly for half an hour."

"You saw them both?"

"I never saw her face. She was closely veiled all the time."

"But you saw the man?"

"Yes."

"And would know him again."

"Like a book."

"We'll visit the Astor House together this afternoon and try to spot him."

"I have a surer plan yet."

"What is it?"

"I saw the boy who carried her card to him. Why not use him?"

"We will. I'll go down with you to-night."

"After following this woman and seeing her safe home I resumed my watch."

"Yes, I saw you when we came from the theatre."

"Well, half an hour after you went in the old darky came out of the adjoining house and went down to Fourth avenue to a drug store."

"What did he get there?"

"I couldn't find out without risking too much."

"You followed him back?"

"Yes, and saw him go in at the area gate."

"Well?"

"He didn't come out again."

"No."

"But at one o'clock he went in again."

"What?"

"At least a perfect double of the old darky went in just as he had done an hour and a half before."

"Chick, you have made a discovery."

"But there's more to tell."

"Go on!"

"He remained half an hour only."

"Well, you of course shadowed him when he went away?"

"Yes."

"Where did he fetch up?"

"On the Bowery below Canal street. He has a room there on the first flight up, over a hat store."

"But he didn't remain there."

"The old nigger did."

"And who came out of the room afterward?"

Chick smiled.

"You couldn't guess."

"Well, we'll say the gentleman who Mrs. Mandeville met at the Astor House."

"You've hit it exactly."

"Oh, it wasn't as hard to guess as you supposed."

"Of course I don't know all you do."

"You shall in good time. I want to find out more about the man at the Astor House. Meet me at the Twenty-third street L station at eight o'clock to-night."

"That will take me off my watch on Madison avenue."

"All right. I think I can relieve you of that hereafter."

When Nick returned to the Mandeville residence about twelve o'clock he met Julia in the hall on the point of going out.

She greeted him with a smile.

"Going shopping?" asked Nick.

"No. I'm going out to luncheon. Will you not go with me?"

Then, having looked hastily around to see if anyone was near, she added, in an undertone:

"I have something to say to you which I prefer to say outside the house."

Nick kept his eyes on her face, but said nothing.

They passed out upon the street.

They soon reached a fashionable Broad-

way restaurant and entered, choosing a table in one corner.

Nick called the head waiter, and putting a five dollar bill in his hand, said:

"I see there are not many people here just now."

"It is early yet—just past twelve o'clock," was the reply.

"Then hold the two adjoining tables for me for an hour. Some friends of ours may come in. Understand?"

The head waiter bowed and said, "It shall be as you wish."

After the waiter had gone away with the order Nick said:

"We shall not be annoyed by persons getting within hearing distance, I think."

"Very thoughtful of you, I'm sure. But I suppose it is the nature of your business to be cautious."

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes you do. You understand that I know you are not Larry Blake."

"You think I am not."

"I know you are not."

"Your proof."

"I have seen Larry Blake."

"Ah! when?"

"Recently."

"Where?"

"That is not necessary to state."

"In a word, you have met two men who each claim to be Larry Blake, your cousin."

"Yes."

"One is an impostor."

"Exactly."

"How do you know that the impostor is not the other man?"

"There are a score of reasons why I know he is not an impostor."

"Who do you think I am?"

"A detective."

"You are not positive?"

"No; only reasonably certain."

"Why should I be in your house, if I am a detective?"

"Because there is work for a detective to do in that house."

"Would I be more welcome to you in your father's house as a detective than as your cousin?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I would help you all I could in your efforts to recover the diamonds."

"You would?"

"I would, in spite of the fact that you entered my father's house believing I knew where they had gone."

"I will not admit that charge."

"You will not deny it."

"I deny that I believe any such guilt on your part."

"Yes, you do now. You have obtained clews since your arrival."

"How do you know?"

"I don't. I merely surmise."

"And who do you think the clews point to?"

"My father's wife."

"You suspect her?"

"I did from the first."

"And have you any proof?"

"Very little."

"Well, give me that little."

"Not as Larry Blake."

"Then as your father's detective."

"Now you are a sensible man. I'll do all I can, honorably, to help you."

"Then what proof have you against your father's wife?"

"She shammed sickness the night after the robbery."

"Yes."

"And went out into the storm when she supposed no one saw her."

"So did you."

Julia flushed scarlet.

"Yes; I saw her from my window go down the stoop and Jennie, my maid, confirmed the fact that it was she."

"Ah! You tried to follow her."

"Yes."

"And failed?"

"Yes. She had too much start."

"I will now ask you one question more, Miss Mandeville. I know you will answer it and answer it truly."

"Ask it."

"Do you know where the diamonds are?"

"I do not."

"Nor have any idea of their location?"

"That makes two questions instead of one."

"But you will answer it, too?"

"And you'll believe me?"

"I said so."

"Then my word for it, I have no knowledge or even suspicion of where they are."

"Thank you. Here comes our luncheon, and if you are willing we will resume our cousinly relations."

"For a time, yes."

At eight o'clock Nick met Chick as per agreement and the two rode down to Park Place.

They went direct to the Astor House.

Nick waited downstairs while Chick went up to the office to find the bell boy he wanted to see.

He had to wait ten minutes before he had a chance to call the boy into one of the reading-rooms, out of sight of the clerks.

Then the lad easily succumbed to the offer of money.

He didn't know "de gent's name," but it was "de man in 47. See?"

Yes, he was there yet.

Chick went down and reported to Nick.

Then Nick went back to the office.

He began to turn over the leaves of the register, searching backward in the column where the number of the rooms were marked.

He found 47 under date of a week previous.

Opposite the number was the name, "Leon Gabriel, Chicago."

Nick made a mental note of it.

Just as he was about to turn away from the desk somebody jostled against him rather roughly.

He looked up quickly.

It was Chick.

The latter said, politely, as if addressing a stranger:

"I beg ten thousand pardons, but I was watching the gentleman just going downstairs. I thought at first I knew him."

Nick bowed with the utmost deference, and turning around, also went down stairs.

He didn't lose sight of the man who had preceded him down. The latter went into the bar and ordered a drink.

While he drank Nick studied him carefully.

"A rascal of the first water," was Nick's silent comment.

Of course it was Leon Gabriel, of Chicago, Mrs. Mandeville's tete-a-tete of the night before, and the double of the old negro in the empty house.

He was not more than forty years of age, and was about Nick's height and build. His face was dark and handsome, suggesting the creole or Italian.

Nick watched him until he went upstairs again.

Then he joined Chick, and the two started uptown.

Once fairly away from the hotel, Nick said:

"That man has the diamonds."

"I thought so," was Chick's quiet remark.

"Don't lose sight of him for the next few days, Chick."

"All right. I'll cover him."

"If anything happens let me know. A chalk line on the lamp-post opposite Mandeville's house will inform me you have news. I'll join you at the house as soon as I see your sign."

CHAPTER IX.

IDA BRINGS NEWS FROM NEW ORLEANS.

More than a week passed by before anything of any importance developed in the case, despite the alertness of Nick and Chick.

Meanwhile Nick kept as close as possible to the Mandeville residence.

He was carefully watching Mrs. Mandeville by day and the closet in the third story front room by night.

And now he was growing anxious for Ida's return.

Twelve days after he took up the case, the long-expected chalk mark appeared on the lamp-post.

He hastened to his own residence.

Chick was waiting for him.

"Well?"

It was Nick's usual way of breaking into business.

"There's news."

"Yes?"

"He met her to-day."

"Mrs. Mandeville?"

"No; the girl."

"Not Julia?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Gilsey."

"You're sure?"

"I saw them. What's more, he has a room there, too."

"Registered?"

"Yes. Leon Martinelli, New Orleans."

"Where did they meet."

"In the parlor."

"She called on him?"

"Yes. He went there this morning and asked for his key. About two o'clock the girl came in and sent up her card. He came down and joined her in the parlor. They had a long, confidential chat."

"How did they part?"

"In a most friendly way. She shook hands with him, and smiled in his face on taking her leave."

Nick's brows knit, and a look came into his face which boded no good for Miss Mandeville.

Chick's next words aroused him:

"Ida has returned."

"Send her in at once."

Chick went out and Ida soon after entered.

Nick greeted her pleasantly.

"Make your report without delay."

"I stopped at Cincinnati," began Ida.

"And did not find Inez de Garvelli?"

"No; she was in New Orleans."

This was not news to Nick. The address of Julia's letter a week before told him that. It, however, made him the more anxious for the rest of Ida's news.

"How long has she been there?"

"Three months."

"Ah! who went with her?"

"You know."

"Miss Mandeville?"

"Yes."

"Where did they stay? Where is the De Garvelli girl?"

"At the house of another schoolmate of the two girls."

"What name?"

"Martinelli."

"What?"

"I said Martinelli. Lolo Martinelli."

"Her father living?"

"Yes."

"His name?"

"Leon Martinelli."

"Did you see him?"

"No; he was not at home."

"Where was he?"

"I don't know. He travels, and is gone sometimes for months. He is very little at home."

"Was he there while Miss Mandeville was in his house?"

"Yes, for a month or more."

"What is his business?"

"Now look out. I've surprising news."

"Out with it."

"He is a lapidary."

"Humph!"

After a brief pause, Nick asked:

"Have you any idea what the Mandeville girl went to New Orleans for?"

"No. But I know she would have an object if she went back."

"What?"

"A lover."

"Met him there?"

"Yes."

"In business?"

"He is now."

"Explain."

"He bought out a small business about the first of March on the installment plan."

"Go on."

"Pays two hundred and fifty dollars a month for one year."

"That all?"

"No. He then must pay five thousand dollars more in cash."

"A poor young man?"

"Yes. Was a clerk in a drug store at a salary of fifty dollars a month."

"How did he meet Miss Mandeville?"

"Through Lolo Martinelli and——"

"Well?"

"Relationship."

"I thought so. He is Larry Blake?"

"Yes."

"The skies are brightening. Now about Mrs. Mandeville."

"She has not lived there for years; not since she was a little girl."

"How did you learn that?"

"There are people down there now who remember little 'Gussie Potter.'"

"Potter was her widowed name."

"It was also her maiden name when her family moved to Chicago."

"To Chicago?"

"Yes. About eighteen years ago. Shall I go to Chicago and continue Mrs. Mandeville's investigation?"

"No; I think I can manage the rest from here."

CHAPTER X.

ONE WOMAN'S CONFESSION.

"In all probability," said Nick to his wife before he left the house, "a young lady will call here this evening and ask for me. If she comes, invite her into my study and ask her to wait for me."

Then he called Chick into his presence and said:

"Keep yourself in shape to shadow Mrs. Mandeville if she attempts to leave the house any time to-night. And let her know that she is being followed."

He left his house and went straight back to Madison avenue.

To his great relief, Jenkins told him Mr. Mandeville had gone down town, and would not return till late.

"Where is Miss Julia?"

"In her room, I think."

"Go tell her that I would like to see her a few moments here in the parlor."

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, Jenkins! Then find out where Mrs. Mandeville is, and remain within call."

"Yes, sir."

Nick had not long to wait for Miss Julia. There was an eager look on her face as she came in.

Nick held out his hand and smiled pleasantly. Then he said:

"We are to trust each other implicitly, are we not?"

"I believe so."

"Well, I have something to say to you, but it will not do to say it in this house. Walls have ears."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Go to a house of a friend of mine at eight o'clock this evening and wait there till I come."

"That is a strange request."

"But an honest one. Remember your father trusts me. Cannot you?"

"Whom does this concern—what you have to tell me?"

"Your step-mother and——"

"Well?"

"Trust me and go, will you not?"

She hesitated a moment, during which time she looked him unflinchingly in the eyes. Then she said, "Yes," so decisively that Nick knew he could depend on her.

"Here is the address," he said, handing her a written memoranda. "Remember, eight o'clock and wait for me if I'm not there."

She returned to her room. Nick summoned Jenkins and sent him to Mrs. Mandeville to say that Mr. Blake was anxious to see her in the parlor.

"And, Jenkins! When she enters this room, keep just out of the way, but see that no one enters or approaches until she leaves."

"Depend on it, sir. It will be as you wish."

Mrs. Mandeville came down from her sitting-room on the second floor promptly to the summons.

Nick noticed that she was growing paler and paler every day. Something was troubling her.

"My dear Larry, what can I do for you?"

"Grant me half an hour's private interview."

"Why, certainly."

"No objection if I close the door?"

"Why, certainly not, if you wish it."

"Mrs. Mandeville," said Nick, placing an easy-chair near the window, "you had better sit down. What I have to say may disturb you."

"How strangely you talk, Larry."

"You need not call me by that name any longer, madame."

"What do you mean?" gaspingly.

"It is not mine."

"Not yours! Not——"

"I am not Larry Blake."

"Then, in Heaven's name, who are you?"

"Nicholas Carter, a detective in the employ of your husband."

"Ah!"

It was a half-smothered scream. She made an effort as if to arise, and then sank back again in her chair. Her face was piteously pale as she gave him a pleading look.

"I came into this house to try to recover those stolen diamonds."

"Oh!"

Her perturbation partly left her.

"I have located the thieves."

The expression on her face changed to one of absolute relief.

Nick, who was watching her, was deeply puzzled.

"I am glad to hear that," she said. "Where are they? Who has them?"

"The man you surreptitiously met at the Astor House last night."

With a muffled shriek she was down on her knees before him, clinging to his coat skirts.

"For God's sake, have you told my husband?"

"I have told him nothing yet."

"Then, for the love of Heaven, do not. He is more than my life to me."

"And yet you would rob him and his daughter."

"Rob them. No; as God is my judge, I have not robbed him nor her. I have deceived him, but only because I could not bear to lose his love."

"Do you dare deny your complicity in the diamond robbery?"

She arose to her feet with earnest mien:

"Yes; I swear by my hopes of salvation that I know nothing about those diamonds."

"Yet you secretly met the thief the

night after the robbery, and last night again."

"You mean Leon Gabriel?"

"Yes."

"Is he the thief?"

"Do you not know it?"

"No. On a woman's honor, I do not."

"Then why did you meet him at the Astor House?"

She wrung her hands and looked an object of misery.

"I'll tell you all, and trust to your sense of manly honor."

"That is right. If you are innocent you shall not regret it."

"Then listen. When I was twenty-three years old I ran away from home—eloped with this man Leon Gabriel.

"After living with him a year we had a quarrel. In his rage he disclosed the fact that we were never legally married; that he had a wife and child living, and our marriage had been a mock ceremony by a man who was disguised as a minister.

"I investigated and discovered that he told the truth.

"Then I left him and threw myself upon my brother's mercy. Under his advice, I claimed to have obtained a Dakota divorce and resumed my maiden name.

"Then I met Mr. Mandeville, and—you don't know how much I love him."

She began to sob.

"Why did you meet Gabriel?" asked Nick.

"He found me out and followed me up with threats. I met him to prevent his going to my husband."

"How did you placate him?"

"He finally agreed to remain silent as long as we remain in this house."

"Why, what was his reason for that?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask. It was some subterfuge. Oh, sir, if you could only help me."

"Mrs. Mandeville, if you have told the truth, and I think you have, I can help you. Now, sleep soundly to-night. Your deliverance is near."

She caught up his hand with a great sob, kissed it, and fled from the room.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER WOMAN'S CONFESSION.

It was half-past eight o'clock that evening when Nick Carter entered his own house.

Julia Mandeville was waiting for him, true to her promise.

He did not keep her long in suspense.

"Miss Mandeville," said Nick, after they were comfortably seated and assured from interruption, "what I shall say to you may tend to make you doubt my sincerity of friendship toward you and your interests—at first. But if you are frank with me and attempt no further concealment, I swear to you that it will be for your future happiness."

She was all eagerness, and exclaimed:

"Go on."

"You spent two months in New Orleans last winter, while your father thought you were in Cincinnati."

She flushed, but answered readily:

"Yes, I did."

"Tell me what your object was in that secret visit to New Orleans."

"I—there were some things about my father's second wife which I didn't like. I thought there was some mystery about her past life."

"And you went to New Orleans to investigate?"

"Yes. Inez and I had a friend living there, and we paid her a visit.

"Inez's mother, meantime, acted as a medium at Cincinnati to receive and forward my correspondence with father."

"What did you discover?"

"Nothing. I believe she never lived in New Orleans. She probably deceived us in that."

"No, she did not."

"What do you know about it?"

"Much more than you found out. I'll tell you later. Now, what kept you there so long?"

Nick was looking at her sharply. She blushed violently and replied:

"I suppose you know."

"I know enough to want to know more."

"How much do you know?"

"I know why you were so sure I was not Larry Blake."

In spite of her perturbation she smiled.

"How far has this—affair gone between you and your cousin?"

"As far as it can go secretly."

"You are married?"

"Yes."

"You have several times, during the last ten days, met the father of your friend Lolo Martinelli at the Gilsey House."

Julia gave a great start. Then she asked:

"Is there anything I can tell you which you don't know already?"

"Yes; we'll come to that soon. Meanwhile, I'll tell you some things you do not know."

"Well?"

"The same man you met at the Gilsey House is registered at the Astor House as Leon Gabriel, of Chicago."

"Why—what is his object in that?"

"Not too fast. The night you followed Mrs. Mandeville from the house you didn't overtake her."

"No."

"But you made a call at the Gilsey House."

"And if I did?"

"To see Martinelli."

"Go on."

"But he was at the Astor House keeping an engagement at that hour under another name."

"With whom?"

"Your father's wife."

"Then I was not mistaken."

"In what?"

"That she is not what she pretends."

"She is the victim of a scoundrel—so are you, and of the same one, under another name."

Julia now turned pale and sat speechless.

"You told me you had no idea who had the diamonds."

"I told you the truth."

"I know it. I can tell you where they are."

"You can?"

"Yes. They are in the possession of that man Martinelli, alias Gabriel."

"And how did he get them—my stepmother——?"

"Knows no more how he got them than you."

"Do you?"

"Yes. At least I think I do. You can confirm my theory."

"How?"

"By telling me of all your relations with this man."

"I will."

"Then, to begin, you leased the Madison avenue house from him?"

"Yes."

"At his suggestion?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now, how did he succeed in persuading you to take the house? Through your love for Larry Blake?"

"Yes."

"Tell me the whole story."

"Well, I met Larry at the Martinellis'. He was living there, or rather, boarding."

"Well."

"He was a sort of protege of Mr. Martinelli's. The latter took great interest in the young Californian—brought him to New Orleans and secured him a clerkship in a drug house."

"Well, go on."

"We loved each other from the very

first. Larry wanted to marry me before I left for the North."

"Then you disclosed your dilemma—the possible loss of the diamonds if you married him without his producing their worth in his own right."

"Yes. Besides, I knew papa's dislike of him on his mother's account, and I knew I would never get the diamonds or any aid whatever from my father, if I married Larry."

"And then Martinelli came to your aid?"

"Yes. Larry had a chance to buy out a drug store in New Orleans, but had no money. Mr. Martinelli was unable to help him. But he made arrangements with the owner to accept twelve monthly payments of two hundred and fifty dollars a month, and five thousand dollars cash at the end of one year."

"And provided for this money."

"Yes; he persuaded me that the terms of my mother's will were unjust, and that after I was eigteen I had a moral right to take the diamonds and do with them what I saw fit, in defiance of the unreasonable bequest."

"Humph!"

"He was agent for a house in New York. The owner was away. It was vacant, but elegantly furnished. He need not account for the rent for a year. I could get the rent from papa and turn it over to Larry, to be paid on the drug store."

"I see."

"Once we were in the house I should have the diamonds brought on from Chicago."

"Certainly."

"I must keep them around the house as long as possible, and watching my opportunity, carry them secretly away and give them into his keeping."

"Oh!"

"He would give me a receipt for them. Then he would gradually re-cut them ——"

"Being a professional lapidary."

"Yes, and as his business is trading in diamonds, he could gradually turn them into money and pay it over to Larry, who, on his part, would be able to pay back the rent for that house in time for a settlement with the owner."

"And you went to the Gilsey House the night after the robbery to tell him about it."

"Yes."

"You met him there some days afterward?"

"Yes, by appointment."

"And told him about the stolen diamonds."

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"He tried to console me, and promised to aid Larry all he could in some other way. I offered to leave the house."

"What did he say to that?"

"He wouldn't hear of it. Said he'd try some way to raise the rent for the owner when it was called for."

"And all the time he had the diamonds."

"In the name of mystery how did he get them?"

"You shall know all in good time. We must now trap our game."

"Good heaven! what will become of me?"

"Miss Julia, trust me. I have asked you to do that before. Do so to the end and you'll not regret it."

"I will. And will you not tell me your name?"

"Nicholas Carter."

"The greatest detective in New York! I have read of you."

"Nothing bad, I hope?"

"Enough of good to assure me that I need have no further cause to not trust myself wholly in your hands."

"Thank you. Now prove it."

"Prove what?"

"Your implicit trust in me. I want you to write a letter."

They left Nick's house together and went direct to the Madison avenue residence. Nick sent Julia for her writing material, and then went into the deserted parlor to wait for her.

She re-appeared very quickly with the material required, and sat down at a table, prepared to proceed.

Nick began to dictate:

"My Dear Mr. Martinelli: I have such good news I hardly know how I can tell it to you. Papa—dear papa—sold a house in Chicago this afternoon for $50,000 cash, and has given me the money for my own, to compensate me for my lost diamonds. He says I may buy another set, which, though they will not be half so valuable as those which I lost, will be my very own to do with as I please.

"It is too late for the banks to-day, and I will have to keep the money till to-morrow, when I will be expected to deposit it. But I want to meet you first and give you the $8,000 for Larry's drug store. Then you can buy my diamonds from time to time with the other $42,000, in such form that they will be convertibble into money most readily whenever Larry needs further financial aid. In a short time I will be able to snap my fingers at poor, good-hearted, indulging papa, and join Larry in New Orleans.

"I want to meet you at the Gilsey and give you the $8,000 to-morrow forenoon. But I don't want to go there unless I am sure to meet you. If you get this in time this evening, walk up opposite our house at nine o'clock sharp. Stop at the gas lamp directly across the street and light a cigar. I will be at the window of my bedroom in the third story front, to let you know I see you.

"If you fail to get it to-night, but it reaches you before nine o'clock to-morrow morning, light your cigar at the same place at that hour. Make our hour of meeting ten o'clock in the morning.

"Burn this letter. I feel I can trust you better than my real father.

"Yours, gratefully,

"Julia."

Without objection, Julia wrote every word as dictated.

At the conclusion, she merely said:

"And now?"

"Now direct and seal it. I'll do the mailing."

CHAPTER XII.

NICK SPRINGS HIS TRAP.

At precisely nine o'clock next night as per instructions, Julia stood at one of the windows in the third story front room of her father's residence fully outlined against the light of the gas on the inside.

She stood there until ten minutes past the hour was marked on the face of her watch.

Then Nick Carter came in and said:

"Pull down the shades and prepare for bed. Do this so that your shadow on the shade can be seen from the outside. Then put out the light and retire to your room."

When the shadow pantomime came off according to arrangement, two men saw it from places of concealment on the opposite side of the street.

One was Nick Carter, and he also had his eye on the other watcher.

The latter waited till the light went out and a white-robed figure came to the window and disappeared. Then he emerged from his hiding-place and muttered:

"The little fool," and passed rapidly down the street.

As soon as he was out of sight Nick entered the house and went direct to his room.

He struck no light, but proceeded to rig out his dummy in the bed by the light which came in from the window.

Then he threw himself down upon the lounge, but not to sleep.

He scarcely moved until two o'clock, when the sharp whistle of a late pedestrian passing noisily up the street bore to

him the tune of "The Last Rose of Summer."

"That's Chick," muttered Nick. "He is telling me that the old darky's double has just passed in through the area gate next door."

He lay still about five minutes. Then he arose, pulled the closet door slightly ajar, and crouched behind a large chair not two feet away from the closet entrance.

For half an hour the silence of the tomb reigned in that room.

Then the closet door moved slowly until the opening was increased half a foot.

A head was slowly thrust through.

Nick knew that the dummy in the bed was indistinctly visible to the man in the closet.

With no more noise than a cat would make the man passed out into the room, and slowly moved toward the bed.

He had got about three feet inside the room when Nick sprang upon him.

There was a short, brief struggle.

Then Nick rose and struck a light.

The intruder lay on his back, on the floor, securely bound.

Nick, panting a little after his struggle, sat down on a chair and calmly looked at his prisoner.

The latter returned his stare and finally growled:

"Trapped!"

"As slick as a rat," said Nick.

"Who are you? The devil?"

"I have not the honor. I am only a poor detective."

"Well, now that you've got me, what are you going to do with me?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On yourself."

"Do you mean that there is a chance for me to be set free?"

"Exactly. Maybe a very slim chance, though."

"What is it?"

"Well, first, you would have to prove that there is no murder existing to your credit."

"That is easy. I am no murderer, whatever else I may be."

"Then perhaps you can prove that the woman who died in this room two years ago did not die at your hands, or by your machinations."

"I can. She was my sister, and I am luckily able to prove my innocence."

"So much the better."

"What else must I do to get out of the scrape?"

"Restore the Mandeville diamonds."

"What if I say I know nothing about them?"

"Then you would lie, and I'd have to send you up for burglary, or worse."

"Well, what else?"

"Explain your mysterious relationship to these two houses, and make several other shady things clear."

"What guarantee would I have that after I did all that, I would get my freedom?"

"The word of Nick Carter, the detective."

"Are you Nick Carter?"

"I am."

"Then there is but one thing for me to do."

"What's that?"

"Make a clean breast of it, and depend on your solemnly pledged promise."

"Are you ready to turn over your latest 'loot,' and make a full confession?"

"On condition that I be allowed to go free."

"If you leave the United States at once, and never return, under penalty of arrest and prosecution."

"Well, I'll do it. What do you want to know?"

"The story of these two houses, and your connection with them."

"Well, they were built by a man calling himself Burton Fitch."

"I know that."

"But Burton Fitch was an assumed name."

"Indeed."

"His real name was Orlando Blake."

"What relation to Larry Blake?"

"His father."

"Then he was a scoundrel, and his brother-in-law's estimation of his character was a true one. Go on."

"He ran away with Lucy Mandeville, and took her to California. There he made a great deal of money gambling. Finally he met my sister and fell in love with her, and she fell in love with him, though both were married. My sister's husband was a poor clerk. She longed for wealth and luxury, but her husband couldn't give it to her. Blake found out her weakness and played on it. She had a daughter ten years old whom she loved dearly. For the child's sake, she refused to elope and go publicly with Blake. He devised a plan which she agreed to. I was at that time dealing faro in a gambling house which Blake was running in San Francisco. It was through me he met my sister. I was their go-between. Therefore he brought me with him when he came to New York. Here he spent lavishly of his money in rebuilding these two houses and furnishing them most luxuriously. Then he employed a skilled artisan and paid him a very large sum of money to put in three secret doors between the two houses and keep the knowledge to himself."

"Three?"

"Yes. One to this room, one to the dining-room, and one to the room in the rear on the second floor."

"The last you used in getting the diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Well, go on."

"He moved into the other house in the guise of an eccentric bachelor, and my sister, with her child, came on under assumed names and occupied this house. She thus carefully guarded her secret from her little daughter. It was the one condition on which she agreed to share Blake's life in private. They were together wherever the little girl and servants were well out of the way. In this manner she kept her secret from everyone, even from her daughter. Meanwhile Blake fairly showered diamonds upon her. Blake lived in the other house with no one but his old deaf and dumb faithful negro servant. One night my sister sent Sampson for me where I was boarding. It was about one o'clock. When I reached her she was much excited. Blake was helpless—dying. Sampson and I carried him through the secret passage back to the other house. He died before morning. Then we hit upon a plan to avoid publicity which might lead to my sister's exposure. We buried him in the cellar and I personated him. It was I, dressed to look like him, who left the house next evening with trunks marked for a European port. It was given out that old Fitch had gone to Europe and left his houses in the hands of an agent. Soon afterward my sister left this house and went back to California to effect a reconciliation with her husband. He was dead; had died of grief and shame. The daughter took diphtheria and also died. Broken-hearted, my sister came back to New York and moved into this house again."

"And died here?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"A suicide."

"And the diamonds?"

"I got them."

"Explain."

"On the night she killed herself I went to her room, this room, where I knew she slept and kept her diamonds—I had seen them here in the afternoon pre-

ceding—for the purpose of robbing her while she slept."

"And found her dead?"

"Yes."

"You couldn't prove it."

"Oh, yes, I could."

"How?"

"Old Sampson, the negro, went with me to the opposite room when I entered here. I went right back as soon as I saw she was dead, and brought him over. In this manner I provided a witness as to my innocence."

"Your confederate."

"Yes. I admit Sampson has been my confederate, and I have paid him well for it. But his testimony, with my own, uncontradicted would acquit me of the charge of murdering my sister."

Nick was forced to admit as much to himself.

"I took the diamonds and went away. Next day she was found dead by her maid."

"What else?"

"Well, I took the keys to this house and left Sampson in charge of the other."

"And never used it till this last robbery was planned?"

"No."

Nick now cut the cords which bound Martinelli.

The two men then entered the closet where Nick found a panel in the wainscoting missing.

They stooped and went through into a corresponding closet beyond. Nick had his bull's-eye lantern which he kept on the man before him constantly.

In the adjoining room they found Sampson waiting for Martinelli's return.

The old negro was frightened to see a stranger come back with his confederate.

By use of the deaf and dumb sign manual Martinelli soon explained the hesitation.

The old negro was badly scared and signified a willingness to leave at once for parts unknown.

They then passed out through the area gate.

Under Nick's instruction Sampson locked the gate and turned over the key to him.

Chick and Patsy were watching outside.

To them Sampson was delivered, with instructions that they were to see him safe across the North River to the Jersey side.

This was explained to the negro.

He started off with Chick and Patsy.

"Now we will transact our little business," said Nick, turning to Martinelli.

"All right; I am ready."

"Where do we go?"

"To a room on the Bowery."

"Over a hat store. I am ready. Lead on."

Martinelli gave Nick a look of admiration.

"If you are not the devil, you must be his brother."

"Then the quicker you put those diamonds into my hands, the quicker you'll be out of the devil's clutches."

. . . . . .

A few more lines and our story is told.

The next day Nick restored the lost diamonds to Mr. Mandeville, with a full explanation.

At first that gentleman raved and vowed he would never forgive his wife or his daughter.

But Nick soon pointed out the folly of such a course, and all was forgiven.

With a lawyer's help Larry Blake and his mother came into possession of the half million left by the deceased father and husband, and no publicity was made of the affair.

Mr. Mandeville forgave his sister and accepted his son-in-law.

The two Madison avenue houses were thoroughly renovated, and to-day Mr.

and Mrs. Larry Blake, with Larry's mother, live in that one so long occupied by old Sampson.

In the other lives Mr. Mandeville and his devoted, happy wife.

Nick carefully concealed the fact from all of them of the burial place of Blake senior, alias Fitch. He alone knows that the latter's bones lie under the surface of the cemented floor of the cellar.

Where the secret passages were doors have been cut. So that now there is free access between the two houses on the first, second and third floors.

Only last week Mrs. Larry Blake received a visitor.

It was Inez de Garvelli from Cincinnati.

She was full of news. The most interesting information which she brought to Julia, however, was that Lolo Martinelli and the entire Martinelli family had suddenly and secretly left New Orleans.

No one knows where they went. But it is rumored they have gone to some point in South America.

An old deaf and dumb negro was with them when they were seen to board a train for Galveston.

From that point they took a vessel for Havana, and then all traces of them were lost.

Nick Carter, when Julia rehearsed the news to him, merely exclaimed:

"I wish we could get rid of all our criminals as easily and completely as we have got rid of Martinelli and Sampson."

[THE END.]

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